THE GYLSTON SLANDER

Another Engrossing Mystery Story of Malcolm Sage, Detective.

BY HERBERT JENKINS.

AS his activities enlarged, Malcolm Sage's fame had increased, and he was overwhelmed with requests for assistance. Clients bore down upon him from all parts of the country, some even crossing the channel, while from America and the colonies came a flood of letters giving long, rambling details of mysteries, murders and disappearances, all of which he was expected to solve.

Those who wrote, however, were as nothing to those who called. They arrived in various stages of excitement and agitation, only to be met by his secretary, Miss Gladys Norman, with a stereotyped smile and the equally stereotyped information that Mr. Malcolm Sage saw no one except by appointment, which was never made until the nature of the would-be client's business had been stated in writing.

The Surrey cattle-maiming affair, and the consequent publicity it gave to the name of Malcolm Sage, had resulted in something like a siege of the bureau's offices.

"The obvious is the correct solution of most mysteries," he had once remarked to Sir James Walton, "but there is always the possibility of exception."

The Surrey cattle-maiming mystery had been a case in point. Even more so was the affair that came to be known as "The Gylston Slander." In this case Malcolm Sage arrived at the truth by a refusal to accept what, on the face of it, appeared to be the obvious solution.

It was through Roger Freynes, the eminent K. C., that he first became interested in the series of anonymous letters that had created considerable scandal in the little village of Gylston.

Tucked away in the northwest corner of Hampshire, Gylston was a village of some eight hundred inhabitants. The vicar, Rev. John Crayne, had held the living for some twenty years. Aided by his wife and daughter Muriel, a pretty and high-spirited girl of nineteen, he devoted himself to the parish, and in return enjoyed great popularity.

Life at the vicarage was an ideal of domestic happiness. Mr. and Mrs. Crayne were devoted to each other and to their daughter, and she to them. Muriel Crayne had grown up among the villagers, devoting herself to parish work as soon as she was old enough to do so.

A year previously a new curate had arrived in the person of Rev. Charles Blade. His frank, straightforward personality, coupled with his good looks and masculine bearing, had caused him to be greatly liked, not only by the vicar and his family, but by all the parishioners.

Suddenly and without warning the peace of the vicarage was destroyed. One morning Mr. Crayne received by post an anonymous letter, in which the names of his daughter and the curate were linked together in a way that caused him both pain and anxiety.

A man with a strong sense of honor himself, he cordially despised the anonymous letter-writer, and his first instinct had been to ignore that which he had just received. On second thoughts, however, he reasoned that the writer would be unlikely to rest content with a single letter; but would, in all probability, make the same calumnious statements to others.

After consulting with his wife, he had reluctantly questioned his daughter. At first she was inclined to treat the matter lightly; but on the grave nature of the accusations being pointed out to her, she had become greatly embarrassed and assured him that the curate had never been more than ordinarily attentive to her.

The vicar decided to allow the matter to rest there, and accordingly he made no mention of the letter to Blade.

A week later his daughter brought him a letter she had found lying in the vicarage grounds. It contained a passionate declaration of love, and ended with a threat of what might happen if the writer's passion were not reciprocated.

Although the letter was unsigned, the vicar could not disguise from himself the fact that there was a marked similarity between the handwriting of the two anonymous letters and that of his curate. He decided, therefore, to ask Blade if he could throw any light on the matter.

At first the young man had appeared bewildered; then he had pledged his word of honor, not only that he had not written the letters, but that there was no truth in the statements they contained.

Two evenings later, one of the churchwardens called at the vicarage and produced from his pocket a letter he had received that morning, in which were repeated the scandalous statements contained in the first epistle.

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FROM then on the district was deluged with anonymous letters, all referring to the alleged passion of the curate for the vicar's daughter, and the intrigue they were carrying on together. Some of the letters were frankly indelicate in their expression and, as the whole parish seethed with the scandal, the vicar appealed to the police for aid.

One peculiarity of the letters was that all were written upon the same paper, known as "Olympic Script." This was supplied locally to a number of people in the neighborhood, and others, the vicar, the curate, and the schoolmaster.

Soon the story began to find its way into the newspapers, and Blade's position became one full of difficulty and embarrassment. He had consulted Robert Freynes, who had been at Oxford with his father, and the K. C., convinced of the young man's innocence, had sought Malcolm Sage's aid.

"You see, Sage," Freynes had remarked, "I'm sure the boy is straight and incapable of such conduct; but it's impossible to talk to that ass Murdy. He has no more imagination than a tin-linnet."

Freynes' reference was to Chief Inspector Murdy, of Scotland Yard, who had been intrusted with the inquiry, the local police having proved unequal to the problem.

Although Malcolm Sage had promised Robert Freynes that he would undertake the inquiry into the Gylston scandal, it was not until nearly a week later that he found himself at liberty to motor down into Hampshire.

One afternoon the vicar of Gylston, on entering his church, found a stranger on his knees in the chancel. Notebook in hand he was transcribing the inscription of a monumental brass.

As the vicar approached, he observed that the stranger was vigorously shaking a fountain pen, from which the ink had evidently been exhausted.

"You are interested in monumental brasses?" inquired the vicar, as he entered the chancel, and the stranger rose to his feet. "I am the vicar," he explained. There was a look of eager interest in the pale gray eyes that looked out from a placid, scholarly face.

"I was taking the liberty of copying the inscription on this," replied Malcolm Sage, indicating the time-worn brass at his feet, "only unfortunately my fountain pen has given out."

"There is pen and ink in the vestry," said the vicar, impressed by the fact that the stranger had chosen the finest brass in the church, one that had been saved from Cromwell's Puritans by the ingenuity of the then incumbent, who had caused it to be covered with cement. Then, as an afterthought, the vicar added, "I can get your pen filled at the vicarage. My daughter has some ink; she always uses a fountain pen."

Subsequently Malcolm Sage was invited to the vicarage, where another half hour was occupied in Mr. Crayne showing him his collection of books on brasses.

As Malcom Sage made a movement to depart, the vicar suddenly remembered the matter of the ink, apologized for his remissness, and left the room, returning a few minutes later with a bottle of fountain-pen ink. Malcolm Sage drew from his pocket his pen and proceeded to replenish the ink from the bottle. Finally he completed the transcription of the lettering of the brass from a rubbing produced by the vicar.

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AS they crossed the hall a fair girl suddenly rushed out from a door on the right. She was crying hysterically. Her hair was disordered, her deep violet eyes rimmed with red, and her moist lips seemed to stand out strangely red against the alabaster paleness of her skin.

"Muriel!"

At the sight of a stranger the girl had paused, then, as if realizing her tear-stained face and disordered hair, she turned and disappeared through the door from which she had rushed.

"My daughter," murmured the vicar, a little sadly, Malcolm Sage thought. "She has always been very highly strung and emotional," he added, as if considering some explanation necessary. "We have to be very stern with her on such occasions. It is the only way to repress it."

"You find it answers?" remarked Malcolm Sage.

"She has been much better lately, although she has been sorely tried. Perhaps you have heard."

Malcolm Sage nodded absently, as he gazed intently at the thumbnail of his right hand. A minute later he was walking down the drive, his thoughts occupied with the pretty daughter of the vicar of Gylston.

At the curate's lodgings he was told that Mr. Blade was away, and would not return until late that night.

As he turned from the gate, Malcolm Sage encountered a pale-faced, narrow-shouldered man with a dark moustache and a hard, peevish mouth.

To Malcom Sage's question as to which was the way to the inn, he nodded in the direction from which he had come and continued on his way.

"A man who has failed in what he set out to accomplish," was Malcolm Sage's mental diagnosis of John Gray, the Gylston schoolmaster.

It was not long before Malcolm Sage realized that the village of Gylston was intensely proud of itself. It had seen in the London papers accounts of the mysterious scandal of which it was the center. A Scotland Yard officer had been down, and had subjected many of the inhabitants to a careful cross-examination. In consequence Gylston realized that it was a village to be reckoned with.

The Tired Traveler was the center of all rumor and gossip. Here each night in the public bar, or in the private parlor, according to their social status, the inhabitants would forgather and discuss the problem of the mysterious letters. Every sort of theory was advanced, and every sort of explanation offered. Whilst popular opinion tended to the view that the curate was the guilty party, there were some who darkly shook their heads and muttered, "We shall see."

During the half hour that Malcolm Sage spent at the Tired Traveler, eating a hurried meal, he heard all there was to be heard about local opinion.

The landlord, a rubicund old fellow whose baldness extended to his eyelids, was bursting with information. By nature capable of making a mystery out of a sunbeam, he reveled in the scandal that hummed around him.

After a quarter of an hour's conversation, the landlord's conversation, Malcolm Sage found himself possessed of a bewildering amount of new material.

"A young gal don't have them highsterics for nothin'," my host remarked darkly. "Has fits of 'em every now and then ever since she was a flapper, sobbin' and cryin' fit to break 'er heart, and the vicar that cross with her."

"That is considered the best way to treat hysterical people," remarked Malcolm Sage.

"Maybe," was the reply, "but she's only a gal, and a pretty one, too," he added inconsequently.

"Then there's the schoolmaster," he continued, "'ates the curate like poison, he does. Shouldn't be surprised if it was him that done it. 'E's always been a bit sweet in that quarter himself, has Mr. Gray. Got talked about a good deal one time, 'angin' about arter Miss Muriel," added the loquacious publican.

By the time Malcolm Sage had finished his meal, the landlord was well in his stride of scandalous reminiscence. It was with obvious reluctance that he allowed so admirable a listener to depart, and it was with manifest regret that he watched Malcolm Sage's car disappear round the curve in the road.

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THE next morning, in response to a telephone message, Inspector Murdy called on Malcolm Sage.

"Well, Mr. Sage," he cried, as he shook hands, "going to have another try to teach us our job," and his blue eyes twinkled good-humoredly.

"Did you see Mr. Blade?" inquired Malcolm Sage.

"Saw the whole blessed lot," was the cheery reply. "It's all as clear as milk," and he laughed.

"What did Mr. Blade say?" inquired Malcolm Sage, looking keenly across at the inspector.

"Just that he had nothing to say."

"His exact words. Can you remember them?" queried Malcolm Sage.

"Oh, yes," replied the inspector, "He said, 'Inspector Murdy, I have nothing to say,' and then he shut up like a real Whitstable."

"He was away yesterday," remarked Malcolm Sage, who then told the inspector of his visit. "How about John Gray, the schoolmaster?" he queried.

"He practically told me to go to the devil," was the genial reply. Inspector Murdy was accustomed to rudeness; his profession invited it, and to his rough-and-ready form of reasoning, rudeness meant innocence; politeness, guilt.

"And yet the vicar would not hear of the arrest of Blade," murmured Malcolm Sage, turning the copper ash-tray round with his restless fingers.

"Sheer good nature and kindness, Mr. Sage," he said. "He's as gentle as a woman."

"I once knew a man," remarked Malcolm Sage, "who said that in the annals of crime lay the master-key to the world's mysteries, past, present and to come."

"A dreamer, Mr. Sage," smiled the inspector. "We haven't time for dreaming at the yard," he added good-temperedly, as he rose and shook himself like a Newfoundland dog.

"I suppose it never struck you to look elsewhere than at the curate's lodgings for the writer of the letters?" inquired Malcolm Sage quietly.

"It never strikes me to look about for some one when I'm sitting on his chest," laughed Inspector Murdy.

"True," said Malcolm Sage. "By the way," he continued, without looking up, "in future can you let me see every letter as it is received? You might also keep careful record of how they are delivered."

"Certainly, Mr. Sage. Anything that will make you happy."

"Later I may get you to ask the vicar to seal up any subsequent anonymous letters that reach him without allowing any one to see the contents. Do you think he would do that?"

"Without doubt, if I ask him," said the inspector, surprise in his eyes as he looked down upon the cone of baldness beneath him, realizing what a handicap it is to talk to a man who keeps his eyes averted.

"He must then put the letters in a place where no one can possibly obtain access to them. One thing more," continued Malcolm Sage; "will you ask Miss Crayne to write out the full story of the letters as far as she personally is acquainted with it?"

"Very well, Mr. Sage," said the inspector, with the air of one humoring a child. "Now I'll be going." He walked toward the door, then suddenly stopped and turned.

"I suppose you think I'm wrong about the curate?"

"I'll tell you later," was the reply.

"When you find the master key?" laughed the inspector, as he opened the door.

"Yes, when I find the master key," said Malcolm Sage, quietly, and as the door closed behind Inspector Murdy he continued to finger the copper ash tray as if it were the master key.

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MALCOLM SAGE was seated at a small green-covered table playing solitaire. A velvet smoking jacket and a pair of wine-colored morocco slippers suggested that the day's work was done.

Patience, chess and the cinema were his unfailing sources of inspiration when engaged upon a more than usually difficult case. He had once told Sir James Walton that they clarified his brain and co-ordinated his thoughts, the cinema in particular. The fact that in the surrounding darkness were hundreds of other brains, vital and active, appeared to stimulate his own imagination.

Nearly a month had elapsed since he had agreed to take up the inquiry into the authorship of the series of anonymous letters with which Gylston and the neighborhood had been flooded, yet still the matter remained a mystery.

For a fortnight Malcolm Sage had been on the continent in connection with the theft of the Adair diamonds. Two days previously, after having restored the famous jewels to Lady Adair, he had returned to London, to find that the Gylston affair had developed a new and dramatic phase. The curate had been arrested for threatening to murder Miss Crayne, and, pleading "not guilty," had been committed for trial.

The incident that led up to this had taken place on the day that Malcolm Sage left London. Late that afternoon Miss Crayne had arrived at the vicarage in a state bordering on collapse. On becoming more collected, she stated that on returning from paying a call, and when half way through a copse, known locally as "Gipsies' Wood," Blade had sprung out upon her and violently protested his passion. He had gripped hold of her wrists—the mark of his fingers was to be seen on the delicate skin—and threatened to kill her and himself. She had been terrified, thinking he meant to kill her. The approach of a farm laborer had saved her, and the curate had disappeared through the copse.

This story was borne out by Joseph Higgins, the farm laborer in question. He had arrived to find Miss Crayne in a state of great alarm and agitation, and he had walked with her as far as the vicarage gate. He did not, however, actually see the curate.

On the strength of this statement the police had applied for a warrant, and had subsequently arrested the curate. Later he appeared before the magistrates, had been remanded, and finally committed for trial, bail being allowed.

Blade protested his innocence alike of the assault and the writing of the letters; but two handwriting experts had testified to the similarity of the handwriting of the anonymous letters with that of the curate. Furthermore, they were all written upon "Olympic Script," the paper that Blade used for his sermons.

Malcolm Sage had just started a new deal when the door opened and Rogers showed in Robert Freynes.

"It's looking pretty ugly for Blade," remarked Freynes, recognizing by the substitution of the briar for the meerschaum that Malcolm Sage was ready for conversation.

"Tell me."

"It's those damned handwriting experts," growled Freynes. "They're the greatest anomaly of our legal system. The judge always warns the jury of the danger of accepting their evidence; yet each side continues to produce them. It's an insult to intelligence and justice."

"To hang a man because his 's' resembles that of an implicating document," remarked Malcolm Sage, as he placed a red queen on a black knave, "is about as sensible as to imprison him because he has the same accent as a footpad."

"Then there's Blade's astonishing apathy," continued Freynes. "He seems quite indifferent to the gravity of his position. Refuses to say a word. Any one might think he knew the real culprit and was trying to shield him," and he sucked moodily at his pipe.

"The handwriting expert," continued Malcolm Sage, imperturbably, "is too concerned with the crossing of a 't,' the dotting of an 'i,' or the tail of a 'g,' to give time and thought to the way in which the writer uses, for instance, the compound tenses of verbs. Blade was no more capable of writing those letters than our friend Murdy is of transliterating the Rosetta Stone."

"Yes; but can we prove it?" asked Freynes, gloomily, as with the blade of a penknife he loosened the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe. "Can we prove it?" he repeated and, snapping the knife to, he replaced it in his pocket.

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"BLADE'S sermons," Malcolm Sage continued, "and such letters of his as you have been able to collect, show that he adopted a very definite and precise system of punctuation. He frequently uses the colon and the semicolon, and always in the right place. In a parenthetical clause preceded by the conjunction 'and,' he uses a comma after the 'and,' not before it, as most people do. eBfore such words as 'yet' and 'but,' he without exception uses a semicolon. The word 'only,' he always puts in its correct place. In short, he is so academic as to savor somewhat of the pomposity of the eighteenth century. Turning to the anonymous letters, it must be admitted that the handwriting is very similar; but there all likeliness to Blade's sermons and correspondence ends. Murdy has shown me nearly all the anonymous letters, and in the whole series there is not one instance of the colon or the semicolon being used. The punctuation is of the vaguest, consisting largely of the dash, which, after all, is a literary evasion.

"In these letters the word 'but' frequently appears without any punctuation mark before it. At other times it has a comma, a dash, or a full stop.

"Such phrases as 'If only you knew,' 'I should have loved to have been,' 'different than,' which appear in these letters, would have been absolutely impossible to a man of Blade's meticulous literary temperament. The most curious factor in the whole case is the way in which the letters were delivered. One was thrown into a fly on to Miss Crayne's lap, she tells us, when she and her father were driving home after dinner at the Hall. Another was discovered in the vicarage garden. A third was thrown through Miss Crayne's bedroom window. A few of the earlier group were posted in the neighboring town of Whitchurch, some on days that Blade was certainly not there."

"That was going to be one of my strongest points," remarked Freynes.

"The letters always imply that there is some obstacle existing between the writer and the girl he desires. What possible object could Blade have in writing letters to various people suggesting an intrigue between his vicar's daughter and himself; yet these letters were clearly written by the same hand that addressed those to the girl, her father and her mother.

"If Blade were in love with the girl, what was there to prevent him from pressing his suit along legitimate and accepted lines. Murdy frankly acknowledges that there has been nothing in Blade's outward demeanor to suggest that Miss Crayne was to him anything more than the daughter of his vicar."

"What do you make of the story of the assault?"

"As evidence it is worthless," replied Malcolm Sage, "being without corroboration. The farmhand did not actually see Blade.

"Having convinced myself that Blade had nothing to do with the writing of the letters, I next tried to discover if there were anything throwing suspicion on others in the neighborhood who were known to use 'Olympic Script' as note paper.

"The schoolmaster, John Gray, was one. He is an admirer of Miss Crayne, according to local gossip; but it was obvious from the first that he had nothing to do with the affair. One by one I eliminated all the others, until I came back once more to Blade.

"It was clear that the letters were written with a fountain pen, and Blade always uses one. That, however, is not evidence, as millions of people use fountain pens. By the way, what is your line of defense?" he inquired.

"Smashing the handwriting experts," was the reply.

"The assault?" queried Malcolm Sage.

"There I'm done," said Freynes, "for although Miss Crayne's evidence is not proof, it will be sufficient for a jury. Besides, she's a very pretty and charming girl. I suppose," he added, "Blake must have made some sort of declaration, which she, in the light of the anonymous letters, entirely misunderstood."

"What does he say?"

"Denies it absolutely, although he admits being in the neighborhood of the 'Gipsies Wood,' and actually catching sight of Miss Crayne in the distance; but he says he did not speak to her."

"Is he going into the witness box?"

"Certainly;" then after a pause he added, "Kelton is prosecuting, and he's as moral as a swan. He'll appeal to the jury as fathers of daughters and brothers of sisters."

"I have asked Murdy to come round," said Malcolm Sage. "I think that was his ring."

"Good evening, Mr. Sage," cried Murdy cheerfully. "Congratulations on the Adair business. Good evening, sir," he added, as he shook hands with Freynes.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he inquired, looking from Malcolm Sage to Freynes. "It's a clear case now, I think."

"You mean it's Blade?" inquired Malcolm Sage.

"Who else?" inquired the inspector.

"That is the question which involves your being here now, Murdy," said Malcolm Sage dryly.

"We've got three handwriting experts behind us," said the inspector.

"That is precisely where they should be," retorted Malcolm Sage quietly. "In the biblical sense. You have done as I suggested?"

"Here are all the letters received up to a fortnight ago," said the inspector, holding out a bulky packet. "Those received since have each been sealed up separately by the vira, who is keeping half of them, whilst I have the other half; but really, Mr. Sage, I don't understand——"

"Thank you, Murdy," said Malcolm Sage, as he took the packet. "It is always a pleasure to work with Scotland Yard. It is so thorough."

Without a word Malcolm Sage left the room, taking the packet with him.

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WHEN he returned he found them discussing the prospects of Dempsey against Carpentier.

Handing back the packet of letters to Inspector Murdy, Malcolm Sage resumed his seat and proceeded to relight his pipe.

"Spotted the culprit, Mr. Sage?" inquired the inspector.

"I think so, was the quiet reply. "You might meet me at Gylston vicarage tomorrow at three. I'll telegraph to Blade to be there, too. You had better bring the schoolmaster also."

"You mean——" began the inspector.

"Exactly," said Malcolm Sage. "It's past eleven, and we all require sleep."

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The next afternoon the study of the vicar of Gylston presented a strange appearance.

Seated at Mr. Crayne's writing table was Malcolm Sage, a small attache case at his side, whilst before him were several piles of sealed packets. Grouped about the room Inspector Murdy, Robert Freynes, Mr. Gray and the vicar.

With quiet deliberation Malcolm Sage opened the attache case and produced a spirit lamp, which he lighted. He then placed a metal plate upon a rest above the flame. On this he imposed a thicker plate of a similar metal that looked like steel; but it had a handle across the middle, rather resembling that of a tool used by plasterers.

"I should like Miss Crayne to be present," he said.

As he spoke the door opened and the curate entered, his dark, handsome face lined and careworn. It was obvious that he had suffered. He bowed, and then looked about him, without any suggestion of embarrassment.

Malcolm Sage rose and held out his hand; Freynes followed suit.

"Ask Miss Muriel to come here," said the vicar to the maid as she was closing the door.

A few minutes later Miss Crayne entered, pale but self-possessed. She closed the door behind her. Instinctively she turned her eyes toward Malcolm Sage.

"Inspector Murdy," he said, without raising his eyes, "will you please open two of those packets? I should explain that each of these contains one of the most recent of the series of letters with which we are concerned. Each was sealed up by Mr. Crayne immediately it reached him, in accordance with Inspector Murdy's request. Therefore, only the writer, the recipient and the vicar have had access to these letters."

Meanwhile the inspector had cut open the two top envelopes, unfolded the sheets of paper they contained, and handed them to Malcolm Sage.

Every one bent forward, eagerly expecting something; yet without quite knowing what. Malcolm Sage lifted the metal plate from the letter. There in the center of the page, in bluish-colored letters which had not been there when the paper was smoothed out upon the blotting-pad, appeared the words:

Malcolm Sage,
August 12th, 1919.
No. 138.

Immediately he had lifted the plate from the letter, Malcolm Sage had drawn a sheet of plain sermon paper from the rack before him. This he subjected to the same treatment as the letter. When a few seconds later he exposed it, there in the center appeared the same words:

Malcolm Sage,
August 12th, 1919.

but on this sheet the number was 203.

Suddenly there was a scream, and Muriel Crayne fell forward on the floor.

"Oh! father, father, forgive me!" she cried, and the next moment she was beating the floor with her hands in violent hysterics.

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"FROM the first I suspected the truth," remarked Malcolm Sage, as he, Robert Freynes and Inspector Murdy sat smoking in the car that Tims was taking back to London at its best pace. "Eighty-five years ago a somewhat similar case occurred in France, that of Marie de Morel, when an innocent man was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, and actually served eight before the truth was discovered. This suspicion was strengthened by the lengthy account of the affair written by Miss Crayne, which Murdy obtained from her. The punctuation, the phrasing, the inaccurate use of auxiliary verbs, were identical with that of the anonymous letters.

"The difficulty, however, was to prove it. There was only one way; to substitute secretly marked paper for that in use at the vicarage.

"I accordingly went down to Gylston, and the vicar found me keenly interested in monumental brasses, his pet subject, and Norman architecture. He invited me to the vicarage. In his absence from his study I substituted a supply of marked Olympic script in place of that in his letter rack, and also in the drawer of his writing table. As a further precaution I arranged for my fountain pen to run out of ink. He kindly supplied me with a bottle, obviously belonging to his daughter. I replenished my pen, which was full of a chemical that would enable me, if necessary, to identify any letter in the writing of which it had been used. When I placed my pen, which is a self-filler, in the ink, I forced this liquid into the bottle. It was then necessary to wait until the ink in Miss Crayne's pen had become exhausted, and she had to replenish her supply of paper from her father's study. After that discovery was inevitable."

"But suppose she had denied it?" questioned the inspector.

"There was the ink which she alone used, and which I could identify," was the reply.

"Why did you ask Gray to be present?" inquired Freynes.

"As his name had been associated with the scandal it seemed only fair," remarked Malcolm Sage, then turning to Inspector Murdy he said, "I shall leave it to you, Murdy, to see that a proper confession is obtained. The case has had such publicity that Mr. Blade's innocence must be made equally public."

"You may trust me, Mr. Sage," said the inspector. "But why did the curate refuse to say anything?"

"Because he is a high-minded and chivalrous gentleman," was the quiet reply.

"But how do you account for Miss Crayne writing such letters about herself?" inquired the inspector.

"I'm not a pathologist, Murdy," remarked Malcolm Sage, dryly, "but when you try to suppress hysteria in a young girl by sternness, it's about as effectual as putting ointment on a plague spot.

"When you are next in Great Russell street, drop in at the British Museum and look at the bust of Faustina. You will see that her chin is similar in modeling to that of Miss Crayne."

"But who was Faustina?" inquired the inspector, unable to follow the drift of the conversation.

"Faustina," remarked Malcolm Sage, "was the domestic fly in the philosophical ointment of an emperor." Inspector Murdy laughed; for, knowing nothing of the marriage or the meditations of Marcus Aurelius, it seemed to him the only thing to do.

SHE HAD BECOME GREATLY EMBARRASSED AND ASSURED HIM THAT THE CURATE HAD NEVER BEEN MORE THAN ORDINARILY ATTENTIVE TO HER.

Crown Jewels of France Stored In Country Bank During War

BY STERLING HEILIG.

PRICELESS Gems Carried About in Shabby Valise—Now Kept in "Burglar-proof" Mechanical Showcase in the Louvre. Many Believe Those on Display Are Only Imitations of World's Biggest Stones.

PARIS, August 9, 1921.

A MAN carried the crown jewels of France in a shabby valise, through the streets of Paris.

There was not a vehicle to be had. All the taxis and auto busses were rushing soldiers to the battle of the Marne.

The enemy was thundering down upon the capital.

The crown jewels must be taken out of Paris.

The shabby valise stopped at a modest flat. The director of national museums handed it to the subsecretary of state for Beaux Arts and took a receipt. Three days the shabby valise stayed in the modest flat—until the Beaux Arts man could get a train for X——. (The railroads were packed with arriving troops and fleeing Parisians.)

At X—— the Beaux Arts man took a receipt from an obscure country bank. Its problematically burglarproof vault sheltered the crown jewels perfectly throughout the entire war—because nobody had an idea that they were there.

Throughout the war they remained there in the shabby valise—the most precious jewels in the world by their associations.

The Regent's diamond—greatest of jewels.

Uber alles! as the song says, uber alles in der welt!

The value of the world's great stones does not depend on their size and purity alone, but on their history and adventures, and the personages who wore them, loved them, lost them, or committed crimes to win them.

The Regent's diamond, nevertheless, ranks also finest and most perfect in Europe as a stone. It weighs 137 carats, and its only superior in mere size, the Orloff, 194 carats, belonged to the Russian crown, and who knows where it now is? Third, used to rank the Florentine, 133 carats, in the Austrian crown jewels, and who knows where it is? The Koh-i-noor, of the British crown, weighs only 106 carats. But think of its name and story, and the name and story of each of them.

Now, in a trick box of the Louvre, it lies on pale mauve satin, the Regent's diamond, often called the Pitt because it came to Europe in the pocket of Pitt, the English statesman. While governor of Madras (and having a pocket) he obtained it at Golconda, he claimed, from one Jamelchund, Hindoo merchant, for $100,000. These details Pitt gave out in a pamphlet to mitigate the odium of other stories of the acquisition, summed up in Pope's lines of the "Man of Ross"—

Asleep and naked as the Indian lay,
An honest factor stole the gem away!

Pitt sold it dirt-cheap to the money-burning French regent for $650,000—at a period when money had ten times its present purchasing value. Any price, today, would be a fancy price; but it would fetch $5,000,000, were it conceivably for sale and anybody dared to buy it. It might have been pretentious.

When the French crown jewels were sold at auction in 1886, four certain objects were withheld from bidding—the regent diamond, the great ruby, the Mazarin diamond, and the sword-hilt of Napoleon—as too precious to be sold, and presumably too terrific to be bought!

* * * *

WHO owns a kingdom's crown jewels?

The king, you say, of course, but they're not his to burn. King Louis VI let Mme. de Pompadour play that regent's gem was really hers, and Marie Antoinette, being queen, knew that the glorious piece of ice was hers to wear; but both put it back honestly, each time, in the crown jewels fireproof safe as safest there. One day, however, Louis XVI took a paltry $175,000 worth of small diamonds and rubies from the crown junk, to pay a certain debt of Marie Autoinette, and it started the French revolution!

The national assembly called it stealing, and ordered all crown jewels to be taken from the palace fireproof and deposited in the national strong room—just a pretext to insult the king and to try their power.

In the national strong room the jewels were safe, what? Tut! tut! Quite promptly and as famously, they were stolen by the Mietto band.

How the king laughed, poor boob! In the greatest police inquiry of the epoch, most of the stolen jewels were finally recovered. (It has nothing to do with the queen's necklace story—except that her desire for a glorious necklace of her very own grew from it.) Only the regent stone eluded search; and at last it was found, in the hands of a wineshop keeper, who had bought it from a stranger for $10!

In all probability both this stone and the koh-i-noor are portions of the fabulous diamond belonging to the grand mogul in 1526—the greatest ever known, in size and beauty. Its story went back, with the pageant of the Indes, for 5,000 years, to the mines of Golconda; and it had been worn by Karna, hero celebrated in the Mahabharata!

Yet there are men who, just to have and wear it, would prefer the Mazarin diamond, called the peachblow, although valued, merely as a stone, in 1886 at a price not above $500,000.

How could the French state sell such a fragment of romantic France for any money?

Cardinal Mazarin, the poor boy who became master of France, one of the dictators of Europe, and secretly married husband of the widowed queen, was a grand collector. In his old age he wept over this peachblow diamond: "Must I leave you "

The wonderful stone had been found on the dead body of the Duke of Burgundy in the Swiss swamp after the battle of Granson, by a Swiss soldier. After changing hands several times it was bought for the King of Portugal. A hundred years later, a French baron secured it for his king, the romantic Henri IV. Sent by the hand of a faithful servant, the latter was attacked on the road. He swallowed the stone; and "after his death, it was found in his body, according to plan!" The baron who invented this novel burglar-proof vault was de Sancy—by whose name the diamond has been often called; but it ceased to be the de Sancy diamond, after some new adventures.

These adventures give the stone its fancy value in the eyes of sentimental English people. It came into the possession of Charles I of England. He passed it to his son before he was beheaded and it was exactly "the sole jewel remaining" which the wandering Prince Charlie sold to Mazarin for $25,000 at the Palace of Blois—in fact as well as in Dumas' romance of "Twenty Years After."

Mazarin bequeathed it to the French state; and here it is.

* * * *

THE great ruby has as grandiose associations for the French. How could they auction off the marvelous stone which King Francis I made the very foundation of the French crown jewels?

It glows red, hot, like a dull fire. It is the greatest ruby in the world. Although uncut, and merely as a raw stone, it would probably fetch $1,500,000 today; but it was worn by Solomon, they say, who received it from the Queen of Sheba. It came to Europe with the Moors of Granada. Peter the Cruel murdered one of their princes, to snatch it from his breast. Around this part of its story Alexandre Dumas wove an entire historical romance—Batard de Mauleen."

Then the great ruby began its new adventures. Through the reigning house of Foix—with whom it had all kinds of adventure—it came to Anne of Brittany. And so, later, having it by inheritance, Francis I made it the foundation stone of the French crown jewels, when he started the collection in 1530.

The four precious and peculiar jewels are now again in the Louvre Palace, exposed to public view in the Gallery of Apollo. They repose in a sensational trick case of steel and plate glass, supposed to be absolutely burglarproof, because the whole business descends through the floor, at night, into a cement chamber hidden in the old masonry of the palace and not in any room at all!

Yet, there is a queer rumor.

Have the French authorities complete confidence in their strong and ingenious burglarproof device—a steel box that is not in any room at all?

Are the crown jewels there?

According to Parisian rumor, they are not there.

So I went to photograph them.

Armed with a special permit the other morning, my photographer and I were in the Gallery of Apollo before opening hours. The sun was striking in the east windows of that glorious long hall where sleepless Charles IX walked melancholy at daybreak with his little dogs, waiting for the court to wake and amuse him. Now, a guardian of the republic was doing it without dogs.

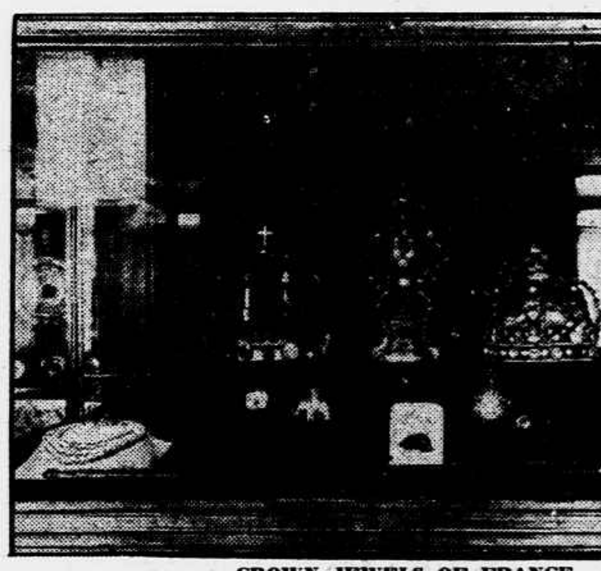
"To photograph the crown jewels!" read the permit.

"Then you believe they're here?" he said. "Those Parisians are crazy. They were so impressed by that country bank idea that they cannot get it out of their heads. I'll show you the crown jewels!"

The great glass case was empty. Also, it had no top. The bell of St. Bartholomew's tolled eight.

The time lock is open, down there," he said, pointing to the floor.

He began unlocking several locks with beautiful big keys. In a hole which opened he inserted a heavy crank and he began to turn. It was heavy winch work. Inch by inch up rose the glass top of the empty case from a trick trap in the flooring. The entire inside case, in fact, was coming up from a black hole—from the cement chamber hidden in the masonry below the floor!



CROWN JEWELS OF FRANCE.

And suddenly the sunlight pouring in the windows lit up glints of topaz, amethyst, emerald, chrystoberyl, jargoon and alexandrite from an extraordinary golden edifice that rose between two queer old crowns.

"On the left the crown of Napoleon, copied exactly from the crown of Charlemagne at Aix," he said. "On the right, the crown of Louis XV, but robbed of its greatest jewels. In the middle, the last glory of the old French kings. It is the commemorative symbol of the peace of Teschen, in 1779, a chef d'oeuvre of the German goldsmith's art."

"Why does France have it?" I asked. "The war of the Bavarian succession was a scrap between all the Germans!"

The French museum guard straightened himself worthily.

"France was mediator," he said simply. "France received this token from their gratitude. Blessed are the peacemakers."

As he spoke the case, no longer empty, blazed inside with a mass of prismatic lightning flashes, blinding to the eye, like heaped electric sparks, white, pink, yellow, red, green, orange, opalescent, shimmering and dancing, and beside them, center of effulgence, a pure fountain of glittering light, the Regent, the most perfect of the world's great diamonds!

The museum guard laughed happily.

"There they are!" he said. "You see them? The great ruby, the Mazarin diamond, the sword hilt of Napoleon. Who can estimate the value of that sword hilt? It is a mass of perfect diamonds, collected one by one to do Napoleon honor, valued fifty years ago at $3,000,000, and today beyond price—for who would dare to break up Napoleon's sword hilt? See it glitter! Do you doubt those stones? All right. Now, listen to the foolish Paris public!"

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THE first party to approach was led by a stout and prosperous man, with a watch charm of the Grocers' Syndical Chamber. With his wife walked a quartet of out-of-town visitors, obviously her relations.

The stout man was showing off.

"The crown jewels!" he whispered heavily. "They were safe in a country bank, all through the war. But they are not safe here—a window of the Louvre has been found broken!"

A school teacher came with a party of boys.

"Pardon," he interrupted. "It would be impossible for a thief to hide inside the Gallery of Apollo. It is kept lighted all night and since the theft and recovery of the Mona Lisa patrol makes the round every two hours."

A solemn young man with eye-glasses backed him up.

"They have suppressed the camp-beds," he said, "so that watchmen must stay awake all night!"

"Then how about the broken window?" inquired the grocers' expert.

A weedy little father of three fine girls joined the discussion.

"If a window has been broken," he said authoritatively, "it's to make the public think of an outside job. Everybody knows that they have found a way to get into the palace from the cellars of the Rue de Rivoli."

"That's true," said a stout dame, fanning herself and perspiring. "When the kings of France lived here they had their secret passages and stairways in the walls!"

The grocery man was clearly worried.

"The crown jewels are not safe, here!" he repeated.

A big, dark man drew him aside.

"They're safe," he whispered loudly, "but they're not here!"

How? What? Everybody mobbed the big, dark man.

"The crown jewels are in the Bank of France," he said, "and these are excellent imitations."

The stout lady mopped her perspiring brow.

"Everybody knows it!" she said.

The Parrot Feather.

HEARD near the old fountain in the sunken plaza at the north front of the Treasury. "What is it?" "Oh. it is something or other that grows. I did know its name, but I have forgotten it." And so forth.

The object of this line of talk is the green growth which most persons interested in such matters have learned to call "parrot feather," a popular name suggested by the green plume-like masses of the plant. It was ten or twelve years ago that this plant was set out in the fountain basin. Cold weather kills it, but the the gardener of the Treasury sets out a bit of the same species of plant each spring and by summer it has reached such a growth that most persons notice it. When parrot feather was planted in the Treasury's north fountain this is what was written in The Star about it:

"What was an old-fashioned fountain trickling a stingy stream is being transmuted by the landscape gardener, or landscape architect, as these gentlemen prefer to be called, into a strange device suggestive of a Christmas decoration. It is the color of emerald, or shamrock, or something equally green and dear. It is growing bountifully upward from the top of the fountain and then falling in feathery and plumey passes. This will continue through the growing season, and soon this plant will veil all the ironwork of the fountain and will hide the bubbling and dripping water. Of course it is a marine plant. Thousands of persons passing the Treasury have stopped and stared at this green growth and have asked many questions."

When the questions first began to come in nobody on duty at the Treasury could answer them. So they sent for a plant-wise man from the Botanic Garden or the Department of Agriculture and he told them. The people at the Treasury tried to remember the name, but could not. Then they had the plant-sharp write it out for them and they set down the name in a big book in the office of the captain of the watch. When persons would ask the name of the crious plant the book would be opened and the questioner would read this: "Myriophylum prosefinacordis." That is the name of the plant. The first word is easy, but the second is a sticker for anybody who is weak and lame in the classics. The "myriophylum" part of it is easy. "Myrio" is from the Greek word meaning ten thousand, from which also comes "myriad." "Phylum" is from "phylon," the Greek for leaf, just as the Latin "folia" means leaf. The wo-- "prosefinacordis" presents difficulties. Perhaps "pro-se" is an arrangement of the words "pro" or forward and "sepere," to creep, meaning to creep forward. "Fina" probably has some relation to "pinna," which means feather, and whence we get "pinnate," "pinnatified" and "pen." "Cordis" may mean ribbed or furrowed, or it may have some connection with "cordate," or heart-shaped. The average man and the average woman might just as well call it "parrot feather" and let it go at that.